

"MY 1102 DAYS OF W. W. II"

By

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EDITED BY
ROSE S. SECREST

WRITTEN IN 1980

*To Lynn
from Dad*

- AUTOBIOGRAPHY -

I was born on February 4, 1905 in Bedford County, Virginia, near Montvale, attending the one room Goldsberry Grade School three miles from home. On June 1, 1924 I went to work for the Bedford Can Co., Bedford, Virginia, which was acquired by Continental Can Co. in 1929. In 1938 I was transferred to the Tampa, Fla. plant, and in 1960 to the Winter Garden plant, where I retired July 1, 1967.

While with the can companies, I followed the Mechanical and Engineering field, maintaining the canmaking equipment as a Machinist and a Tool and Die Maker. Later I held the position of Machine Shop Foreman, Master Mechanic and Plant Engineer, and for the last 15 years held the position of Manufacturing Engineer. This was continuous service with the exception of three years I spent in the armed forces of World War II.

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- FOREWORD -

This is a brief summary of my service for my country in the Seabees during World War II, from 1-11-43 to 11-6-45. During this time I was with the 6TH Special U.S.N. Seabee Construction Battalion. I served time in the Fijis, Guadalcanal, Bougainville and the Ulithi Group of Islands in the Western Carolines. Part of the time we were attached to the famous 3RD Marine Division in the Pacific.

I dedicate the following memoirs to my wife, Rose, and children, Lynn Secrest Brainard and Ernest L. Secrest II and other members of my family, so that they may better understand my contribution in the armed forces.

I. TRAINING

On 11-1-42, I enlisted in the Navy Seabees as a Machinist Mate First Class Petty Officer, and was called to report for Active Duty at Jacksonville, Florida, 1-11-43, for induction into the service. From there I was taken to Camp Bradford near Norfolk, Virginia, where I went through six weeks of basic training in the 85th Construction Battalion. I was pulled out of this battalion on 2-24-43, along with a number of other experienced men of different trades and sent to Camp Peary near Williamsburg, Virginia, and placed in a replacement center. In a few days we were placed in the 6th Special Battalion which was to serve as a stevadore outfit. The word "Special" meant that we had been selected for our task.

In a very short time we were required to learn cargo handling plus all types of Marine Combat Training. The Marine training us - an N.C.O. - had seen service overseas and was just as tough and mean as they get to be. If there was a mud-hole around, he would see that we got in it before the day was over; we obeyed him as we didn't dare open our mouth. Luckily there were not many mud-holes because the ground was frozen solid most of the time. In addition I had my share of other duties, such as KP, guard duty and policing the grounds, which consisted mostly of picking up cigarette butts. But we had one thing in our favor, no one went hungry as they fed us very well.

One night when the temperature was at zero, Brill - another mate - and I had guard duty from 0200 to 0600 on connecting posts. Brill said he was freezing. I said, "Why don't you put on more clothes?" He replied that he had on all the clothes he owned.

While in replacement we were sleeping in tents and before going to bed I removed only my shoes and put on my coveralls over the clothes I had on, for we were provided with one blanket only. We had a coal stove, but being in a tent it didn't do much good. The cold weather was hard to take after spending the five previous winters in Florida.

The following poem tells what one mate (F. W. Tagtmeier) thought of Camp Peary:

Three months in Camp Peary,
Three months of nerve wracking hell.
I can't say I'm sorry I'm leaving,
I'm ready to travel a spell.

So I'm packing my sea bag to travel,
I'm washing the mud from my face.
And I don't give a damn where they send me,
As long as it's some other place.

We live like a hog in a mud hole,
In a 2x4 hut made of tin.
They say it's the rain that makes it muddy,
But it's only the tide coming in.

They can send me out front in the morning,
And the Axis can turn on the heat.
If the only way back is through Peary,
Don't worry, I'll never retreat.

Here's another poem along the same line, author unknown:

You can have our Army khaki, but I'll take my Navy Blue.
There is still another fighter that I'll introduce to you.
His uniform is sure well known, to which you will agree.
The Huns call him a seadog - but he's really a Seabee.

He came to sea with one idea - to work at a trade he knew.
A rating he got to fit the trade, but the training was something new.
He trained down at Camp Peary, the land that God forgot,
Where the mud is 14 inches deep, and the rain just doesn't stop.

Where it's cold as ice one day and mighty warm the next
Where he hears about the Civil War and learns the fight was fixed.
Where he stands in line most everyday from early morn 'til night
Where he learns to march - throw hand grenades and ends full of fight.

He's put on K.P. detail and many dish he's dried
He's also learned to make beds - a broom he sure can guide.
He's peeled a million onions and twice as many spuds.
He also spends his leisure time in washing out his duds.

Now, honey, take this tip from me - I hand it on to you
Just grab yourself a Seabee, for there's nothing he can't do
And when he gets to Heaven - to Saint Peter he will tell
A Seabee, Sir, reporting - I've served my time in Hell.

As a native born Virginian, I didn't agree with everything said in these
two poems, but they still tell a pretty good story of Camp Peary.

II. CALIFORNIA BOUND

On 4-5-43 our battalion boarded two trains for the west coast. After a five-day ride in a day coach and hardly enough to eat, we arrived at Port Hueneme, California, 50 miles north of Los Angeles, the naval embarkation point. They used two trains because of fear of sabotage, and, in addition, we were routed differently, as we traveled across the states. At chow time they would stop and connect onto two diner cars (all of which was planned ahead). Being afraid of someone deserting, we were not allowed off of the train for any exercise. We complained so much they, finally, let us off after four days, at Yuma, Arizona. All along we were confined to an assigned car with a guard at each end. Only officers or anyone with a pass was permitted to leave the car.

The following day we were given a fourteen day leave. I purchased a round-trip train ticket back to my home in Virginia to spend a few days there before going overseas, and then again back to California. My parents home was only 250 miles from Camp Peary where we had just left, and almost in sight of the railroad we traveled on. During the last 18 days I had crossed the United States three times from coast to coast by train, in day-coaches. It was surprising how they kept an eye on us going to California and then turned us loose for 14 days.

During the few days in California they gave us lectures on various subjects before going overseas, and issued our "pieces" (M1 Rifles) and other necessary items for a full pack. We went out on the rifle range for target practice a number of times to get the feel of our pieces. This was down my

alley. With my score of 120 points out of a possible 125, I qualified for a sharp shooter immediately, but the Seabees did not recognize this accomplishment.

While there we went out of the camp area on a work detail crossing the road into the dock area. About the time we arrived there, I found it necessary to look for a head (rest-room). I asked permission from the Chief in charge to return across the road back into camp, and that was no problem. In starting back across the road I was halted by a marine guard who asked: "Where are you going?" I told him. He said, "You are not going to cross that road, you may start across but I am going to shoot you." I didn't start across, for he meant what he said. I went back to camp and sacked up.

III. ISLAND X HERE WE COME

On 4-30-43, our battalion of approximately 1000, along with several other outfits, the 88th C. B. Battalion, the V.M.B. 312 Unit and the Argus 14 Unit, a total of 3500 troops went aboard a troop transport ship, the MORMACPORT.

That afternoon we pulled anchor and headed for parts unknown. We were cautioned not to fall overboard, because the ship would not stop to pick us up, for fear of enemy submarine.

When I woke up the next morning I had to head for the "rail" along with alot of other men and try to empty my stomach, (even though it was already empty). After that I had no problem of being seasick.

Very few people on the ship knew where we were going, the rest of us had no idea, but from the scuttlebutt that went on, you could pick any island in the Pacific.

After being at sea for a few days someone spotted the Southern Cross just above the horizon. As we continued to watch this each night it would be a little higher in the sky. This told us we were going south as well as west.

It was very hot below deck, particularly in the day time, and a half way decent seat on deck of the ship was always at a premium. One day "Utah" Johnson and I had good ones in the shade, so George Miller walks up in a hurry and said, "Johnson, you are wanted at the OD's Office" (Officer of the Day). Away he went, but he was back shortly and calling Miller names I can't print here. Of course, Miller wanted his seat.

After ten days at sea, as we were about to cross the Equator, the honorable "King Neptune" came aboard. He is King of the ship while there and

no one dares cross his path. The majority of us not having crossed the Equator before were known as Polliwogs. As Polliwogs we had to go through the initiation ceremony performed by the more experienced voyagers, known as Shellbacks, that had been through this initiation before. Going through this ordeal we were well aware that you had officially become a Shellback.

On 5-12-43, a Tuesday, we went to bed and surprisingly the next morning when we arose, it was Thursday. Going west we had crossed the International Date Line during the night, which caused us to lose a day.

For the long and lonely two weeks we were traveling at about 22 knots, and our speed was our only defense against submarines. Sitting on deck at night we could tell by the position of the stars that we were on a zig-zag course, to keep from being tracked by enemy submarines. During this time we saw only two other ships, (friendly). Water, water, water.

IV. SO THIS IS ISLAND X - FIJI

On 5-14-43 we sighted land for the first time since leaving the states. This turned out to be Viti Levu, the main island of the Fiji group, 1700 miles N. E. of Australia. We landed at Vunda Point, disembarked and set up camp nearby, this was about half way between Lautoka and Nadi (Nandi) on the northwest side of the island.

Only half - about 500 of the battalion stopped at Viti Levu, C & D Companies and half of headquarters. I never did learn where the other half (A and B Companies) went.

The Fijians people were good-natured and friendly. If we visited one of their homes (grass huts) they would insist on us having a drink of Kava, a brew they made from the roots of a pepper plant grown there. It tasted putrid. "Bula Monocco" was their way of greeting one another, and consequently we were all greeted "Bula Joe." About 50 years prior to our being there, the natives from these and other islands practiced cannibalism.

Fortunately the Marines and Army were there first to set up a base before the Japanese did.

Lautoka, a small town nearby had a bar and a few stores where we could buy (British) Indian jewelry and a lot of other junk. Rice (one of my tent mates), and I usually spent our Saturday's Liberty there. If we arrived there at twelve o'clock noon when the bar opened, we could get a cold Australian beer; after that they were hot, because it was sold so fast from the keg. We soon learned to like it warm, as the Australians and English do. We had no problem getting a ride to and from town. The (Army and Marine) trucks would

pick us up. On one trip we rode into town on top of a load of 500 pound, live bombs.

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Our main job was what we had been trained for - handling cargo from ship to shore, shore to ship and ship to ship. As there were not any loading docks on the island large enough for ships to dock by, nor that had an area on land for storage nearby, all cargo had to be moved by barge from one place to another.

Everything the troops used on the island from toothpicks to 32-ton Sherman Tanks had to be brought in, as well as supplies for the fighting ships. These ships wanted a supply base as near as possible to the front line or where their action was to eliminate travel time for supplies.

The cargo ships carried these supplies from the states to wherever necessary. Some arrived completely loaded with gasoline and oil (50 gallon drums), some ammunition (shells and bombs), others with mixed or general cargo, trucks, jeeps, guns (90, 105 mm and 5-inch), canned food and all the other supplies necessary to conduct a campaign of this magnitude.

It is inconceivable how much work is involved in unloading an average size Cargo Ship, for it is capable of carrying about 7000 tons (depending on the type of cargo) in her 5 Holes or Hatches - two of which are forward of the Bridge and the other three aft. When necessary we could assign around the clock a crew (18 or 20 men) to each hole to move a lot of cargo.

For a while I was assigned as coxswain on a LCM (landing craft medium 25 tons capacity), that was used to move cargo in the Fiji. The difficult part

of the task was having to stay with this craft day and night except for the times I went to chow. It had no cover to get out of the weather and no sleeping quarters, so I used an army cot and my poncho for shelter. If the weather became too rough, I had to tie down the cot so it would not slide off into the water. Sharks fins were a common sight around most any day.

If I happen to be at anchor in the harbor at meal time one of the men from camp would come out to take me ashore. One evening during a bad thunderstorm my ride who was using a small boat came half way out into the bay - became frightened and returned to camp. His superior ordered him back to pick me up. I was thankful for the rescue, because I was being pitched every direction on that flat bottom barge.

The LCM had two 220 H.P. marine engines that made this craft very powerful and maneuverable. This power was required to pull it back off the beach. With a load you could throw the rudder first right and then left to "walk" the barge back off of the beach. You could reverse one of the screws and spin it around like a top.

The Fijians, by far, had the most delicious pineapple that I had ever tasted. They were huge and golden yellow. The natives lads would bring them to us for a mere 25 cents apiece.

V. MOVING ON UP - GUADALCANAL

We left the Fijis on 12-30-43, on a Navy attack troop transport along with several other combat and support ships. Two days later 1-1-44, we stopped at Espiritu Santo Island of the New Hebrides group, 1100 miles N.E. of Australia - the Navy's port of rendezvous with other ships. Ashore all we saw was a few natives and coconut groves. Leaving there the same afternoon with more ships of all types, we knew we were bound for enemy territory.

After two more days (1-3-44) we pulled into the bay at Tenarue Beach, Guadalcanal of the Solomon Islands, 700 miles east of New Guinea. At this time the beachhead was pretty well secured, but there were still some enemy on other parts of the island.

I had heard of the steaming jungles but never thought I would ever see them as real as they were on this island. In most places the undergrowth was so dense it never dried out and the humidity stayed close to 100 percent. It would rain for a few minutes, then the clouds would move on and the sun would bear down causing the steam to actually rise from the jungles. Shortly it would be raining again, with another repeat performance.

The most beautiful sights we encountered on this island were flocks of wild parrots. Their feathers were brilliantly colored in different combinations of blue, green, red and yellow. They were continuously chattering and flying around carefree in the trees as any wild birds would.

We were there for about two weeks without much to do; so this gave us a chance to look around at all the wrecked planes around Henderson Field and the burned out ships on the beach. We visited a native village and, also, "Bloody

Knoll", which overlooked Henderson Field. This knoll was a network of fox-holes, that had exchanged hands several times a day when the Japanese were trying to retake this airfield. Whichever side controlled Bloody Knoll controlled the airfield.

This native village we visited was quite an adventure; one of the men in the group of about eight checked out a truck and said get in, we're going for a ride, and off we went. Evidently the driver knew where he was going, for after a couple of miles on this road he turned up a stream for another mile or so. I thought he would never make it, as the stream was nothing but a continuous bed of large stones and deep water holes. Their village consisted of 8 or 10 huts built up on stilts or piling, the floor being about head high. We saw no reason for this as they were built on high ground. They were friendly but we didn't find out much since the natives did not speak English, nor did we speak their language.

We knew there was something big in the future because of all the "Gold Braid" around. There were Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Vice-Admiral Williams F. "Bull" Halsey Jr. and all of their Lieutenants. In addition there was alot of scuttlebutt as to our next move.

VI. MOVING ON UP - BOUGAINVILLE

We left Guadalcanal on 1-18-44, on a LCI - Landing Craft Infantry - along with a flotilla of ships. After two days at sea we went into Empress Augusta Bay at Bougainville, just as it was getting daylight. This was planned so as to enable us to unload and give the ships time to get back out on the high seas before dark. The Jap's planes would be there with their bombs as soon as it was dark. They waited until then in order to avoid our fighter planes. Bougainville, another one of the Solomon Islands group, about 50 miles wide, 150 miles long and 6 degrees south of the equator, was well fortified by the enemy.

We landed on Puruata, a very small island in the bay which was about one half mile in diameter and one half mile offshore, as the water was too shallow for the LCI to go into Torokina Beach which was located on the main island of Bougainville.

While the ships were being unloaded all guns were manned as a precautionary measure. I was assigned to a 50 caliber machine gun on the bow, that I had target practice on the first day out. About the time we sat down to eat breakfast the PA system blared out, "A plane has been picked up on radar; all gunners man your guns on the double." Shortly another message - "Hold your fire - this is a friendly plane - repeat: hold your fire - this is a friendly plane." This turned out to be a damaged carrier-based plane diverted to land at our air strip rather than to attempt a landing on the carrier.

Just before dark we were able to obtain an LST landing craft to take us

over to the the main island, where we slept in the jungles and ate K rations until we cleared a spot for our tent and had the mess hall operating. The tent location we (Morris, Sloan, Rice and I) were assigned happened to have a small stream running through it. I wrote Rose we were living in class as we had running water in our tent. This was soon corrected by a ditch back of the tent and also a board floor.

Before the American forces landed on Bougainville, the Navy had really poured the big gun ammunition and bombs into the beachhead area, particularly the small island of Puruata. This left the island in a desolate shambles of blasted trees and countless shell holes, the majority of the Japanese were killed; the rest committed suicide, rather than being taken prisoners - consequently it was given the name "Suicide Island."

When we - the United States - went into Bougainville, our intentions were not to take the whole island but to gain a beachhead. This was accomplished. This horseshoe-shaped area was about 5 miles deep and 15 miles around which included two airfields taken from the enemy. This was secured and a three-stage defense line built around it.

For several months the Japanese planes came over every night just after dark and this meant a total blackout. They did not do a lot of damage - it was more of a nuisance raid that kept us in our foxholes for about half of the night. They did hit one of our gasoline storage dumps which caused a terrific explosion and fire. They had a big airbase 300 miles west of us on Rabaul, plus a huge naval base 900 miles north of us at Truk Lagoon.

Our real danger was from flak or shrapnel falling from the exploding 90-millimeter shells being thrown at the planes. To protect ourselves we built bunk-size shelves over our bunks and stored our sea bags, duffle bags and all our gear there to protect us in case we were not able to make it to the foxhole in time. This flak would come down about the speed of a bullet which

would go right through the tent and floor into the ground.

Our beachhead area had a squadron of Australian fighter pilots, a battalion of Fijians soldiers in addition to the American troops. All total there were about 45,000 of us at the height of the conflict. Our estimate of the enemy troops at that time was about half as many as ours, but it turned out that there were about 80,000 of them.

Both Guadalcanal and Bougainville are very mountainous, the latter had two active volcanos. One of those, Mt. Bogona, over a mile high, was only about ten miles from our camp. It steamed and smoked continually; a number of times at night we were awakened by its rumbling and shaking the ground.

The 3rd Marine Division - 2nd Raider Reg. placed this sign on Bougainville in honor to the Seabees of which I have a picture:

When we reach the isle of Japan
With our caps at a jaunty tilt
We'll enter the city of Tokyo
On the roads the Seabees built.

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On 2-27-44, 27 months since Pearly Harbor, our forces launched the largest naval air strike of W. W. II against the huge Japanese naval base in the Truk Lagoon, sinking more than 50 of their ships of the First, Second, Third and Fourth Fleet, destroying 265 of their planes in the air and on the ground, plus the majority of their ground fortifications.

VII. THE SECOND BATTLE OF BOUGAINVILLE

In March 1944, the Japs made an assault to drive us off the island, which they almost accomplished. They over-ran the two outer defense lines in places but were stopped by the third line, with the exception of a few that managed to slip through. Previously the marines had secured the beachhead area and had already moved on, and the area had been turned over to the army.

A call was made for re-enforcement and in a few days the harbor was full of troop, cargo and combat ships. As it turned out the troops were not used at that time, but we did unload the badly needed ammo, bombs, and gasoline. We were put on an 18-hour day - 6 on and 12 off. We had to go to work 6 hours earlier each day when you think in terms of a 24 hour day. It was impossible to get your system adjusted to this, (18 hour day), but we lived through it with very little complaining at a time like this.

On one occasion at the height of the push we were unloading 500 pound bombs onto Ducks (a 2 1/2 ton amphibious truck nicknamed "DUCK"), which would take their loads to the beach and right on to the fighter strip. The planes (Douglas dive bombers) would load up and head for the enemy line. The enemy was so close we could see the planes from the ship dive to drop their bombs. The planes would come out over the harbor from the air strip and one plane accidentally dropped her bombs not far from the ship we were working on. The pilot immediately turned around and went back for another load.

With the use of these Ducks we were able to save time since we did not have to transfer the cargo onto a truck at the beach. Still it was difficult to load these ducks by the ship, as the water there was never very calm. They

were about the size of a heavy truck and almost impossible to set the load down in the cargo area, as they were continually bobbing up and down and sideways like a cork. On one occasion we had a load come down on one side of the duck as it was coming up caused the vehicle to turn over and sink. The driver managed to swim to the Jacobs ladder and climb aboard the ship safely.

To better understand the above you should know the procedure of this type of unloading a ship. One of the booms is rigged to hold the cable approximately over the center of the ship's Hatch and the other one is set to hang out over the side over the barge. The winch operator who sits in the center of the ship by the controls right near the ship's hatch, cannot see the load once he lets it over the outside of the ship, where the average deck is 30 or 40 feet above the water. He must take orders from a signalman by the rail where he can see both the load and the barge. Thus, it is obvious that the margin of error and danger is great, with the ship rolling and the duck or barge moving.

The above method of unloading cargo is limited to the weight per load, depending on the size of the ship and its structure, and is used mostly on loose cargo that requires a net. On heavier loads such as trucks, guns and tanks it is necessary to use the "Jumbo Boom" which is more complicated and slower. This single wooden boom (being 15 or 18 inches in diameter and about 40 feet long) carries the load from the ship's hatch to the barge (or whatever) on a heavy cable and moving the load sideways by heavy lines being controlled from two powered capstans, one near each side of the ship.

On one occasion in using the Jumbo Boom we worked ourselves into an embarrassing situation, as we were unloading a 5 Inch Gun weighing 5 or 6 tons. As usual the men on the two capstans were taking orders from the signalman when one of them failed to release his line (controlling the side movement of the load) as the other man was taking his side in. This broke the

1 1/2 inch line - allowing the load to swing out over the water, ahead and beyond the barge. No one volunteered to crawl out on the boom to attach a line, but someone came up with the idea of lassoing it. This soon relieved us of this predicament.

The heaviest piece of equipment we unloaded was a 60 ton floating target, used for Naval gun practice.

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During the push a few of the enemy broke through the lines into our territory, hiding out during the day and coming out at night to find something to eat in our mess halls. Several were captured or killed. One of our men - a cook - was killed with a knife as he went into the mess hall early one morning.

If for any reason we left the camp other than work (and sometimes then), we had better have the M1 with us. When we went to bed that rifle and my knife were ready and within reach. The latter was an eleven inch bowie knife that my brother Roy had made for me.

Guard duty was one job I did not especially care for but all of us took our turn at it. At night we always had 6 or 8 guards placed around the camp at equal intervals. As corporal of the guards, it was my duty to make a round every hour to see that everything was secure. There was a 45-Colt in the O.D.'s office that I could carry, but preferred my knife, since the enemy would slip up behind you and put one around your neck and cut your throat with the other, without making any noise.

Prisoners were a very valuable source to learn information from about

their strategy, but it was extremely difficult to capture them, as the majority would fight until death or commit harikari before being taken prisoner. There was a bounty at one time of a hundred dollars on each one brought in alive. The Fijian soldiers were great Scouts, as they had a way of sneaking up and taking them alive.

The Marines didn't collect many rewards on prisoners, as they usually eliminated them on the spot. They did bring in one that spoke English tied onto the hood of a jeep. On questioning him, the prisoner made some smart remark to the Marine that had captured him. Without batting an eye the Marine raised his BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) and filled him full of holes.

After this enemy assault was over we received a letter of commendation from Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander in Chief of the United States Pacific Fleet for a job well-done in stopping the Japanese. Later this became known as the "Second Battle of Bougainville."

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While unloading 5-inch shells (projectile) weighing nearly 100 lbs. apiece from the ship's hole just forward of the bridge, we placed the shells in a cradle made for this purpose, holding about 75 or 80. We set this load down on the steel deck of the barge; the men there would disconnect the slings from one side of the cradle and have the winch operator raise the cradle spilling the shells rather than removing them by hand one by one. This made a lot of noise and the sparks did fly, but it did save valuable time. The skipper of the ship came out on the deck above all excited and said harshly, "You can't do that, you will blow up my ship." I replied, "Skipper, there's a war going

on right over there and those people need this ammunition." We continued right on. The shells, minus the fuse, were loaded with explosive powder.

At the time the Japanese were making their big push - some nights we would go to sleep with the five inch guns and the 105MM Howitzer going continuously and we would wake up next morning with them still going. We had learned to sleep with the noise. One of the 105MM was not far back of us; the concussion would shake our tent when the gun was fired.

After the enemy had been pushed back into their area, Rice and I went up on a high ridge at the most forward defense line overlooking the enemy territory. The army men told us about two of our men being stationed as lookouts in a huge tree nearby before the Japs made their push. and the last thing that was heard from them (by phone) was that one had been killed.

On re-taking this ridge the enemy who had dug in under this lookout tree had to be burned out by flame throwers. While standing there talking and surveying out into enemy territory, we turned around and to our surprise we were looking directly into the muzzle of a 105 gun, camouflaged in the edge of the bushes.

The 90MM ammunition is a high power shell and is used principally against enemy aircrafts. The 105MM is a standard shell and is used in surface combat. Both of these are assembled in a brass shell or casing known as "fixed type." The 5-inch and larger ammo is not assembled, due to its weight in loading. All of the three above are equipped for time fuses, which are screwed in just before use and pre-set for explosion as required or set to explode on contact.

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On one occasion while unloading gasoline in 50-gallon drums we ran across an empty one which we placed on top of the loaded barge. We were at the end of our shift so we signaled the beach not to send after us as we would be coming in on the barge.

The beach crew that was unloading barges was unaware of the empty drum. When the barge beached, a truck backed in for a load and I said, "Come on fellows, let's get this barge unloaded." I grabbed this drum, straining every muscle as with great difficulty and threw it on the truck. It was all unbelievable to the beach crew until it hit the truck, for then they realized by its sound that it was empty.

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The LST landing-ship-tanks was an ideal craft for moving cargo. It had a load capacity of 125 tons which we could load up to 650 four hundred pound oil drums, or four 32-ton tanks and take this load onto just about any sandy beach area. It was necessary to go in at a speed of about 5 knots to position the barge far enough onto the beach that a truck could go in or out after lowering the ramp.

To aid the motors in pulling the craft back off of the beach into deep water, the Skipper would winch in the cable onto an anchor that had been dropped several hundred feet while going in. (The name of this craft was changed to LSU, Landing Ships Utilities, in 1952 and the name LST was given to a larger landing craft).

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After being there three or four months supervising men in handling cargo, my trade rating was changed from Machinist to Boatswain Mate. Shortly thereafter I was promoted to Chief Boatswain Mate.

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Before the marines left the new M16 Garrand rifle supposedly the latest and best had been issued to them. Pop Rice would have given his right arm for one of them to take back to New Hampshire to hunt deer. But, of course, no one could get one legally, and those that did, had to turn them in before starting home.

Each company or outfit had a gun-smith and spare parts to keep their guns in good shape, and they would all help you if you needed a part. So Rice started out one day to visit the gun-smiths. At the first place he told them he needed a barrel, at another, a gun stock, at another a magazine and at another a firing mechanism. He continued until he had a complete gun. And as far as I know, he still has one of the Garrand Rifles without the government having any record of it.

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After things quieted down somewhat, the Army transported us by ducks to and from the ships in the harbor. On one accasion at the end of our shift at midnight, a driver picked up our gang of 20 men from the ship. As there were

no crews following us as usual all lights were cut off on the ship and beach. I knew how to reach the beach area in the dark by heading for a V-shaped gap in the mountain that was visible at night. Thinking the driver knew where he was going, I didn't notice until the wheels of the vehicle began hitting coral reefs and the breakers began coming over the stern, that we were off course. I immediately ordered the driver to reverse his screw and not to move the steering wheel. This kept the vehicle across the breakers and brought us back out into deeper water that enabled us to get on the right course to the beach.

He had been heading for the outer side of Puruata Island where the breakers were always rough. If we had been caught in the trough of one of those breakers we would have never made it back to shore.

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After we left Bougainville the island was turned over to the Australian Forces. Sometime later they made an all-out drive to eliminate the enemy remaining there, by bombing shelling and keeping their supply lines cut. At the end of the war it was reported that the Aussies had killed 8 or 9 thousand and another 10 thousand plus died from sickness or starvation, as there was no way for them to get any food or supplies.

VIII. MOVING ON UP - ULITHI

After a stay of about nine months on Bougainville the American and Allied forces had cut the Jap's supply lines to a point where they were of little trouble or danger to us. So it was time for us to move on up again. On 10-1-44, we went aboard an LST to take us out in the harbor to a Navy troop transport. About half way out the ship signaled us to stand by as they were not quite ready for us.

The bottom of the LST was just as flat as a pancake and the bay there rolled continuously.. After about half an hour nearly every man in headquarter company was "sick as a mule," and emptying their stomachs over the rail as they had not been on water for nine months. Members of C and D Company were accustomed to being on water almost every day. We went aboard the transport a short while later and left along with a flotilla for parts unknown, again.

On 10-10-44, we made a stop at the Admiralty Islands, 200 miles N.E. of New Guinea, leaving there the same day with more ships and escorts, and crossing the equator during the night while heading northwest. Looking at a map of that area you can see that we were surrounded by the enemy's fortified islands, Rabaul, New Guinea, Palau, Yap, Turk and Guam. We had a number of alerts of enemy planes and submarines, but had no encounter with the enemy. During these alerts we had to go below deck to an assigned area. It was hot down there at night and most unbearable in the day time.

After another nine more days (10-19-44) we pulled into Ulithi Atoll harbor. We unloaded our gear and set up camp on the island of Asor, which was

only about half mile wide and one mile long. Ulithi, about 900 miles east of the Philippines is a small group of islands in the Western Pacific that belong to the Western Caroline group. There are 6 or 8 of these islands but we used only 3 or 4 of the larger ones.

Expecting the Japanese to still be on these islands, the American Forces, as customary, blasted them thoroughly with shells and bombs before invading. After going ashore we found that the enemy had moved out before our arrival - no doubt in a hurry as they left so much of the equipment behind. Ironically, one piece of this equipment (an old Aircompressor) had been made in the United States. We also learned that we had killed a number of natives. One of these regretfully was the daughter of King Ueg, the Chief of this group of islands. This tragedy was hard for the Chief to endure and still befriend us. He and his natives were moved to Fassarai, a near-by island, as we needed this group of islands, along with the well protected harbor for a Naval Supply Base. The Chief, paralyzed from his waist down, was carried around in a wheelbarrow by the natives.

These islands and the coral reef connecting them formed a circle of about 15 miles in diameter. There were only two places deep enough for ship passage into the harbor. Those were kept closed by nets (under water) when not being used. At low tide one could almost walk from one island to another.

This atoll made an ideal harbor, but we were only 200 miles from Yap and 400 miles from Palau and Guam, right between the latter two. For a while we had some enemy planes fly in under radar and give us a scare. One plane dived into the mess hall on the next island. We did confiscate a two-man submarine inside the harbor before it did any harm. The submarine ended up as a display on the beach.

The first five or six days on Asor the flies and mosquitos were so thick there would be half a dozen flies on every bite of food before you could get

it to your mouth and the mosquitos would suck you dry day and night. The Japanese left this island in a terrible mess. There was also a filthy mud hole (lake) on the island that we filled in and had the island sprayed a few times by plane. After that it was ideal as far as the insects were concerned.

The day before we arrived there, a typhoon had gone through this area. It left things in a mess. Large boats were way up on the beach and others sunk. An LST was left standing straight up, resting on its stern with one-third of the bow section protruding out of the water.

It required 18 days to make this most dangerous move of about 1700 miles (way the crow flies) from Bougainville to Uluhe. The slowest cargo ships in the group governed the convoy's speed and it was necessary to pick our safest, and no doubt a much longer route, through that hornet's nest of enemy controlled islands. In avoiding the typhoon by allowing it to pass ahead of the convoy we also lost considerable time the last two or three days out.

This harbor was known as the secret supply base of the Pacific for the famous "58 Task Force", which consisted of battleships, carriers, cruisers, destroyers and all of the smaller support ships.

The Task Force would stay out on a mission for 10 or 15 days; then return for rest and recreation and to replenish their supplies. After approximately 8 or 10 days they would head out to sea again to blast anything and everything that belonged to the enemy. While out on these missions the men were constantly on alert and badly needed the rest.

Some ships returned badly battered up by the enemy. Among them was the "Carrier Franklin" which had lost her complete superstructure. Usually there were a number of dead compatriots on board as we could hear the mournful sound of taps from the bugler as they were being laid to rest on Asor.

At times there were up to 1500 ships in the harbor and at night it looked like a lighted city. We had gangs working out there at night and even when

the lights were on we had to depend on the compass to return to camp, even in the day sometime. A few times at night we were caught out in the harbor during an alert when all the lights went out leaving us in pitch darkness. This made it very difficult to find our way back to camp, as there were no landmarks to guide us as we had at Bougainville.

Due to the limited amount of storage space on the islands some of the Merchant Marine ships sat in the harbor for months before their supplies were used up by the task force. This area was considered a combat zone which gave the crews of these ships additional pay while there. I decided then that I had volunteered for the wrong service.

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Having been on Asor for five or six months we did not have enough work to keep us busy. There was no place to go and nothing to do there, so life became rather monotonous. I kept myself busy by carving out a checkerboard with my pocket knife and making a footlocker, both of which I brought home. Otherwise Stoney, another chief, and I passed some of the time away playing gin rummy.

About this time I applied for a commission as Warrant Officer, never expecting to hear from it again. Five months later the approval caught up with me. I will explain that later.

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After we had things well under control, alot of beer came in. The Army did the hauling from the beach to a large storage quonset hut. This was doled out at two cans per day, per person, for the enlisted men. Two cans per day was not enough to satisfy some people. While a barge of beer was being unloaded at the beach, a man from C Company checked out a truck from the OD's office which was the same type as the Army used. He drove to the beach, backed in, was loaded up by the crew and off to C Company he went, instead of going to the warehouse. This beer disappeared immediately.

On unloading the beer from the ship some of the men became so intoxicated while working down in the hole of the ship that they required help in getting back up the ladder. They would go back under the wing out of sight, open a case, drink what they wanted, turn the case over and send it out with the full ones. As a result of this a marine guard was stationed in the hole when unloading beer from then on.

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Our crew loaded a LST barge from a large cargo ship and we went along to unload it onto another one. The skipper in pulling away from the starboard side and being parallel to the ship he could not see his way clear from the left side, but assumed it to be. At the same time there was a much larger LCI coming at right angle from the left just ahead of the ship, which could not see our barge either. The bows of the two crafts slammed together, knocking several of our men that were riding on the bow into the water.

The skippers saw one another in time to reverse their screws full throttle, but not in time to prevent the accident. One man was sucked under

the LCI by the surge of water from the screws of the two crafts and was carried about one quarter of a mile away by the current before we were able to pick him up. He was very lucky not to get hurt but was exhausted when rescued.

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Ernie Pyle, the well know newspaper columnist of World War II was killed on Ie Shima, an island near Okinawa. On his way there he had stopped at Ulithi and had lunch with us in our chow hall. He wrote many syndicated editorials for several American newspapers.

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All the islands that we had been on were not far from the equator and the weather was hot and very humid in the day, but it did cool off at night, particularly on the islands that were mountainous. The island of Asor was only about ten feet above sea level and it was the hottest one yet. We wore wide brim safari type hats to protect our faces from the sun. When working on the beach (unloading barges) the thermometer would reach up to 120 degrees F. At this temperature the reflection of the sun from the beach sand and the water would blistered our faces.

IX. HOMEWARD BOUND

For several days the scuttlebutt was really flying, as we heard rumors that we were returning to the States. It wasn't long after that a crew came in to replace us. We were told to pack up as we would be leaving for the states within a few days.

No doubt we needed some rest and recreation after 26 months out there. We had accomplished what we were sent there for, as we were credited with unloading more than 500,000 tons of cargo. All of this had to be handled at least twice and some four times (ship to storage and back to ship again).

So on 6-8-45 we went aboard a Navy troop transport and bade farewell to the Western Pacific Islands. We had about 7500 miles of water ahead of us. Since there were enemy submarines still around, the trip had to be made again on a zig-zag course, which involved more miles. Two subchasers escorted us and fortunately we had no problems or alerts.

We did encounter some rough weather for a few days. The bow of this huge ship would dip down to a few feet of the water, then it would rise up again to about 40 feet. I ventured to the bow but didn't stay very long for it gave me a strange feeling, I must admit. It would be hard to believe this without actually experiencing it. The waves being so high when we and the escorts, which stayed about one quarter mile to each side and ahead of us, were in a trough at the same time and we were unable to see one another. Don't ever let anyone tell you that there is not alot of water out there in the Pacific.

What does one do 24 hours a day for 25 days on a troop ship? I had no clothes to wash as I had them all clean when we left, and when they became

dirty I just cast them overboard. About all there was to do was eat, sleep, play cards, watch the flying fish and the two subchasers plow through the water.

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If you recall, while going west, we lost a day when we crossed the International Date Line. On the way back we picked up a day by having two Tuesdays in one week.

After 16 days and nights of traveling (6-24-45), we pulled into Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. It all started on there Dec. 7, 1941, when the Japanese made a surprise attack sinking 18 of our ships including the battleships Arizona, California, Oklahoma and the West Virginia. The Arizona and Oklahoma are still resting there. Several of us went into Honolulu that night and took in a hula show; later we stopped in an open sidewalk bar and I had a glass of milk, the first one since I left the states. The next day we were underway again.

After returning to work at Continental Can in Tampa, Florida I hired Ted Dawson as a machinist. Some time later he asked me if I had been in Honolulu during the war since he knew I had been in the Navy. I replied, "Yes." "Did you stop by an open bar and buy a glass of milk?" he added. I said "yes" again. Ted was working on the island during the war and saw me drinking milk and thought it was so unusual for a sailor.

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We had a wonderful view of Waikiki Beach and the well known Diamond Head Mountain on leaving Oahu Island, as we sailed around the southern side. After nine days of sailing, the seagulls began to show up and we began to weave our way through and around the rugged Farallon Islands which are offshore from San Francisco. We knew then that we were getting close to the States. With the help of the Coast Guard we had no problem. Some of these protruding rocks in the water reminded me of huge cypress knees, that could wreck a ship if it did hit one. Oahu Island had the same type of huge boulders sticking out of the water on the southern side.

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On 7-3-45, we arrived in San Francisco harbor after a long, long ride, and went into temporary quarters in Oakland. Of course, we were all anxious to be on our way home, but first I had to make arrangements to take my footlocker to the express office and make a train reservation. Before departing there we were given a 30-day leave plus travel time and then report to the Washington D.C. Navy Yard.

The earliest reservation we could make was on 7-5-45, leaving on a six P.M. train. This gave us (those traveling together) a chance to purchase our dress uniforms, have them fitted and time to take a bus across the Golden Gate Bridge into San Francisco to look the town over.

According to my ticket, the "San Francisco Limited", a very plush train, was to take me to Chicago." Arriving at the station to board the train, the conductor informed me, "This is not your train. Your ticket indicates that you must belong on the second section." Within an hour it was loading and

again I was told, "This is not your train." I began to wonder if I really did have a train. About an hour later the third section pulled in -- this was it! But it was not the limited special that my ticket had led me to believe. No doubt these obsolete day coaches had been retired at least twenty years or longer before the war.

We finally settled down for a long ride home with about six more people than seats in each car. With half a dozen people standing around, you can bet your life you would lose your seat when it became necessary to go eat or use the rest room. On returning it was your turn to sit on the floor or take your exercise until you had a chance at another seat.

This was my fourth trip across the States riding in day coaches. It proved one thing, you are able to survive for five days without a bath.

Changing trains in Chicago and Cincinnati and sleeping next to different people - both male and female for five nights and having traveled 10,500 plus miles in the last 35 days, I finally arrived in Roanoke, Virginia and home.

X. REPORTING BACK IN

Having been home in Virginia with my parents for a few days and having seen almost everyone, I took another train ride to Tampa, Florida to see my "True Love", Rose, and friends at the plant where I had worked. I returned home to spend the remainder of my leave with my family and finally reported to the Navy Yard at Washington D. C. on 8-9-45.

Within a few days I became ill with pneumonia and was sent to the sick bay (hospital). While still there I heard the news that the Japanese had surrendered (8-15-45). After getting back on my feet I was shipped by train to Camp Endicott at Davisville, R.I., and arrived there the next morning, 8-27-45.

This camp was one huge place, and at that time it was being used mostly as a make-up area for units assigned to a second round of duty. I was moved around from one place to another but finally placed with a group of men forming a company of about 125, and on 9-4-45 scheduled to leave by train for the west coast for overseas duty again.

On the very same day we were to leave someone discovered that ten of us, including me, had not had our required physical examinations. I was placed in charge of this group to take them "top side" on the double, to have this performed and return to the train station with our gear.

I was unable to convince any of several doctors to rush us through; I had no other recourse but to go to the base commander's office (Captain someone) with my problem. Things really began to happen fast; in less than two hours we had our physicals and were at the train station ready to go.

There we were told to stand by until they received our reports on the physicals. When these arrived three of us had not passed and I was one of them, and to this day I don't know why. I was relieved knowing that I did not have to go through that again, at least not for the present.

When I told my company commander (a second lieutenant) what I had done to have the doctors perform the physicals, immediately he became nervous and shaky at the very thought of an enlisted man going to the Captain of the base to solve his problem. (Normally, one must go through proper channels with a request of this nature.)

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After eight hectic days of being pushed around, I had it pretty soft from then on. Two other Chiefs and I were put in charge of a large barrack holding about a hundred young men just out of boot camp. These were being held back for correction of some medical defect, mostly bad teeth, before being assigned to an outfit. We took turns in going down each morning at 0800 to call muster (roll call), march them up to the drill field and turn them over to some work detail. Usually our work for the day was over other than seeing that the men kept the building shipshape.

I had several requests to take other jobs on the base, but I was short of only a few "points" to be eligible for discharge, and in this case they had rather not use me. This suited me fine!

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I received word one day to report to top side personnel office. I couldn't imagine what this was all about. I was informed that my request for Warrant Officer while overseas had been approved more than three months ago and had just caught up with me. If I had accepted this commission, I would have been eligible for more than three months of back pay and uniform allowance, but I would be required to put in at least 90 days of additional training. As I was anxious to be discharged and knowing that in about a month I would have my required points by remaining where I was, I refused the promotion.

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Camp Endicott was about twenty miles out of Providence, R. I., our liberty town. I could go out on leave most any night or week-end I desired. Not knowing anyone in town it was not very exciting there, but it was some place to go and was better than sitting in camp.

They had electric trolley buses (like street cars) running between the camp and town. Going to town one day the bus driver pulled over to the curb to pick up a passenger. Another bus behind us decided to go on past, forgetting that his overhead trolley pole was on the same line as ours, causing the fire to fly from the trolley line, and from our bus driver, also. He called the other bus driver names I had never heard of before.

XI. A FREE MAN

News came that I had been looking for for months and months. My number of points made me eligible for discharge. I, along with a group of other men, received orders 11-4-45 to pack up and that the following day we would be going to Boston to be discharged. You can bet that I was at the head of the line. We spent that night in Boston and were discharged from the United States Navy, in the Fargo Building the next morning (11-6-45) and given train fare back to Tampa. (I was proud to say that I weighed the same - 181 pounds - as I did when I enlisted).

I stopped in Arlington, Virginia to see my sister, Marion, arriving there about 10:00 P. M. I removed my "P" coat and started to hang it in the closet, and to my surprise, there was an Army topcoat hanging there. It belonged to my brother Wayne, who had also just been discharged, unbeknown to me. He was tired and had gone to bed. We had not seen one-another since some time before the war started. I decided to awaken him and the two of us stayed up and talked for most of the night. He had served in both the African and the European Theaters as crew chief on the famous old C-47 cargo planes. (My youngest brother - Pete - was still serving in the Army of Occupation of Europe).

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Spending a few days at home in Virginia, and taking my 1941 Dodge out of storage, I headed back to Tampa and returned to work at Continental Can on 11-20-45.

I was glad to be back at work, but I felt that I didn't fit in at the plant as well as I did when I had left. So many changes had taken place, mostly in personnel. I had gone through some very unusual experiences in the last three years and that, no doubt, had a lot to do with it.

Guess I can't complain as I went through three years of service without a scratch. The only serious problem I had was having Fungus in one ear while stationed on Bougainville. Our battalion doctor sent me to the Naval Base on the island. The name of the doctor that treated me sounded familiar, Colhoun (Lt. Commander). Having learned that we were both from the Roanoke, Virginia area, he invited me to a back room where we had a very neighborly chat.